

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08
INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 MCT-01 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 AGRE-00
/100 W

-----122521 060803Z /14

R 051155Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7008
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 1538

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINS, PINT, SU
SUBJECT: LABOR STRIFE IN SUDAN

REF: KHARTOUM 942

1. THERE HAVE BEEN SERIOUS LABOR DISPUTES IN SUDAN DURING PAST WEEK. ON APRIL 3, POLICE USED TEAR GAS IN CLASH WITH WORKERS IN ATBARA, RAILWAY CENTER ON NILE NORTH OF KHARTOUM. EXTENT OF VIOLENCE, POSSIBLE INJURIES AND REASON FOR CLASH ARE UNKNOWN. OFFICIALS QUERIED YESTERDAY APRIL 4 GAVE VARIOUS EXPLANATIONS FOR INCIDENT. ONE SAID FORMER LOCAL UNION PRESIDENT RETURNING UNDER AMNESTY ACT HAD PRECIPITATED RIVALRY AMONG UNIONS AND EPISODE WAS NOT ECONOMIC STRIKE ACTION. MORE POPULAR RUMOR IS THAT DEMONSTRATION BY RAILROAD WORKERS FOR HIGHER WAGES WAS OPPOSED BY POLICE. ATBARA HAS BEEN SUFFERING FROM PETROL AND ELECTRICITY SHORTAGES AND PROBABLY CONSUMER GOODS. AT MOMENT SIXTY OF 150 LOCOMOTIVES ARE
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DEADLINED BECAUSE SPARE PARTS ARE UNATTAINABLE, THUS IDLING LARGE NUMBERS OF EMPLOYEES AS FEWER TRAINS ARE MOVING. MOST OBSERVERS IN KHARTOUM ASSUME INCIDENT WAS AUTHENTIC STRIKE.

2. IN KHARTOUM TECHNICIANS LAUNCHED WORK TO RULES STRIKE ACTION SATURDAY APRIL 1, MAINLY AFFECTING CONTROL

TOWER OPERATIONS AT KHARTOUM AIRPORT, POST AND TELEGRAPH COMMUNICATIONS AND HOSPITAL LABORATORIES. VICE PRESIDENT ABUL GASSIM HAS MET WITH TECHNICIANS TRADE UNIONS IN SERIES OF MEETINGS TO NEGOTIATE END TO STRIKE. ONLY PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY HIM HAVE BEEN TO EFFECT THAT STRIKES ARE ILLEGAL AND HARMFUL UNDER MAY REVOLUTION. SUNA REPORTED TODAY, APRIL 5, THAT IN FOUR-HOUR SESSION YESTERDAY ABUL GASSIM AND UNION LEADERS AGREED TO ESTABLISHMENT OF BROAD-GAUGED COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS JOB EVALUATION AND CLASSIFICATION SCHEME AND SUBMIT RECOMMENDATIONS WITHIN ONE MONTH. LIFTING OF STRIKE IS TO BE DISCUSSED WHEN DIALOGUE CONTINUES TODAY BETWEEN ABUL GASSIM AND UNION LEADERS.

3. OFFICIAL PRESENT AT FOUR-HOUR MEETING YESTERDAY SAID ABUL GASSIM INSISTED THAT TECHNICIANS UNION DID NOT EXHAUST OTHER REMEDIES BEFORE LAUNCHING SLOWDOWN STRIKE THUS STRIKE WAS DOUBLY ILLEGAL. ABUL GASSIM ALSO SAID SUDANGOV WOULD NOT NEGOTIATE WHILE STRIKE IN PROGRESS. PRESS ACCOUNTS DO NOT REFLECT THIS TOUGH ATTITUDE. NEWLY ESTABLISHED COMMITTEE ANNOUNCED IN SUNA INCLUDES OFFICIALS OF VARIOUS TRADE AND PROFESSIONAL UNIONS, GOVERNMENT AND SSU OFFICIALS, AND REPRESENTATIVES OF FARMERS, MERCHANTS AND EMPLOYERS. SSU OFFICIAL IMPLIED THIS BROAD COMMITTEE APPROACH IS EDUCATIONAL FOR UNION LEADERS. ONE NOTES THAT IT ALSO DELAYS CONFRONTATION TO PERMIT FURTHER EFFORTS TO DEVISE SOME SOLUTION SHORT OF SIGNIFICANT WAGE INCREASES.

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4. THREE OF ELEVEN TECHNICIANS TRADE UNIONS ARE INVOLVED IN PRESENT STRIKE, AFFECTING 3,000 MIDDLE-LEVEL EMPLOYEES. HOWEVER, GOVERNMENT WELL AWARE THAT TEACHERS, DOCTORS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL AND LABOR UNIONS ARE WAITING IN WINGS TO SEE HOW TECHNICIANS STRIKE IS RESOLVED. LAST YEAR SUDANGOV WAS GIVEN MEMORANDUM BY UNIONS PROPOSING ACROSS-BOARD WAGE INCREASES ON GRADUATED SCALE TO COUNTER 25-30 PERCENT INFLATION RATE. LAST PREVIOUS GENERAL WAGE INCREASE WAS IN 1974. IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSAL FROM UNIONS WOULD NOW COST SUDANGOV ESTIMATED 100 MILLION POUNDS WHICH OF COURSE IT LACKS.

5. IN DISCUSSIONS WITH UNION AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DURING FORTUITOUS KHARTOUM VISIT BY AF LABOR ADVISER SLEZAK, INABILITY OF SUDANGOV TO GRANT ADEQUATE WAGE INCREASES WAS BLAMED ON DESPERATE FINANCIAL CONDITION OF GOVERNMENT. SUDAN GOV MUST HOLD LINE ON WAGES BECAUSE IMF HAS MADE CUT IN EXPENDITURES PRECONDITION FOR EXTENDING URGENT BALANCE OF PAYMENTS HELP. TOUGH-TALKING PROFESSIONAL UNIONS HAD BEEN PERSUADED DURING LAST MONTH'S TALKS TO POSTPONE STRIKES BUT TECHNICIANS UNIONS HAVE BROKEN RANKS. ONE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL LAMENTED THAT UNION LEADERSHIP DOES NOT KNOW ECONOMICS.

6. COMMENT: LABOR UNREST HAS BEEN FESTERING AT LEAST SINCE
EARLY MARCH (REFTEL). WORKERS FEEL THEY HAVE LEGITIMATE
ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES IN LIGHT STEEP INFLATION. HOWEVER, SUDAN
GOV IS IN BIND BECAUSE OF EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FINANCIAL
SITUATION AND STRONG IMF PRESSURE AGAINST WAGE INCREASES.
MOREOVER, ABUL GASSIM, STRICTLY SPEAKING, IS CORRECT; STRIKES
ARE ILLEGAL AND OTHER REMEDIES EXIST. INDICATIVE OF CONCERN
OVER LABOR UNREST HAVE BEEN RUMORS THAT COMMUNISTS, PRESUMABLY
BACKED BY SOVIETS, ARE BEHIND LABOR STRIFE. AT ONE TIME
COMMUNISTS HERE WERE DOMINANT IN LABOR MOVEMENT, AND OBSERVERS
CONSIDER IT NATURAL THAT THEY WOULD WISH TO TEST AND EMBARRASS
NIMEIRI REGIME NOW AS THEY EXPLOIT REAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF
WORKERS AT A TIME WHEN SUDANGOV SIMPLY CANNOT AFFORD TO MEET
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DEMANDS.
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